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# Portrait, Patriarchy, Mythos: The Revenge of Gertrude Stein

BY NEIL SCHMITZ

I may say that only three times in my life have I met a genius and each time a bell within me rang and I was not mistaken, and I may say in each case it was before there was any general recognition of the quality of genius in them. The three geniuses of whom I wish to speak are Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso and Alfred Whitehead.

She always was, she always is, tormented by the problem of the external and the internal. One of the things that always worries her about painting is the difficulty that the artist feels and which sends him to painting still lifes, that after all the human being essentially is not paintable.

*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

There are three portraits of Gertrude Stein in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*: the monumental Gertrude who sits heavily in Picasso's celebrated portrait, her somber face distorted by Picasso's struggle with it, Alice B. Toklas's loving profile of the wronged and denied genius who rang her bell in 1907, Gertrude's Alice's Gertrude, a cunning self-portrait always framing the significance of Picasso's portrait, and a third, the self-effacing portrait of the *I* who at last seizes Alice's discourse, announces the writer's presence, and cleverly declares our innocence. This unknown Gertrude Stein, the peer of Picasso and Whitehead, who has lurked all along inside Alice's prosaic *I*, emerges, as it were, only to disappear. "I am going to write it," she asserts in the penultimate line of the text, "as simply as Defoe did the autobiography

of Robinson Crusoe.”<sup>1</sup> The allusion is deftly figured. Nearly everyone who matters in the history of modern art knows Gertrude Stein, knows the establishment at 27, rue de Fleurus, or the house in Bilignin, knows the pictures on her walls, her dog, knows Alice B. Toklas, they are all cited and catalogued in the *Autobiography*, the already famous and the merely promising; and yet within this charmed convivial circle, receiving F. Scott Fitzgerald, dismissing Ezra Pound, feeding Picasso, Gertrude Stein is inconsolably alone in her thought, marooned. To apprehend this solitude, the disembodied *I* that signifies Gertrude Stein, we must turn from the easily flowing style of Alice’s narrative, from the social externality of the historical person, into the massed utterance of all those unpublished, unread novels, plays, meditations, poems, into the scripture, the true activity of Gertrude Stein’s mind. *I am not here*. It is the final statement of the *Autobiography*, the consummate stroke, and this is the trick, the act of revenge, upon which the text is turned.

Neither Picasso’s portrait nor Alice’s in the *Autobiography* constitutes Gertrude Stein. Picasso’s portrait, which now hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, is primarily the resolution of an artistic problem. One sees clearly enough in the strangely constructed face at once Gertrude Stein as Enigma and the thinking of *Les Femmes d’Alger* and *Three Women*. Though she would remark in her later study, *Picasso* (1938), that the portrait “is the only reproduction of me which is always I, for me,”<sup>2</sup> this singular aptness is not, as we shall see, its proper significance in the *Autobiography*. As for Alice’s profile, it is an advertisement humorously realized. Through the ruse of her appropriated voice, Gertrude Stein constantly refers us to the outlying mysterious *oeuvre* that justifies her place beside Picasso and Whitehead, the writing in which she, not Alice, speaks. Yet this voice is never abused or strained in its speech. Indeed Alice’s daftness is the perfect foil for quick cuts. It is the droll wife who speaks, who

1 *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1933), p. 310. Subsequent references will be indicated *ABT* in the text. Unfortunately the only available paper back edition of the *Autobiography* (Vintage) places Gertrude Stein’s photograph on the cover and her name above the title, exposing the ruse that complicates the text. It also deletes the sixteen photographs that appeared in the first edition, the first and last of which are intrinsically related to the text. For a vigorous interpretation of the textuality of all the photographs, see Paul K. Alkon’s “Visual Rhetoric in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*,” *Critical Inquiry*, 1 (June, 1975), pp. 849-881.

2 *Picasso* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 8. Subsequent references will be indicated *P* in the text. In “Au Tombeau de Charles Fourier,” *The Georgia Review* (Winter, 1975), Guy Davenport suggests that Picasso’s painting of Gertrude Stein alludes to Degas’s portrait of the American artist, Mary Cassatt. Both women sit casually with their “American elbows” on their knees.

domesticates the swash buckle of Ernest Hemingway and Ezra Pound, who looks bemused upon the large male ego. In that role, the role of the observant wife, Alice evidently saw a good deal. The allure of the *Autobiography* is just this: what Gertrude's Alice saw, the promise of intimate portraits, the promise of revelation (sixteen beguiling photographs are carefully sprinkled through the first edition), but if we lose ourselves in these anecdotal sketches, these private views, we lose as well the story that weaves these stories — Gertrude Stein's metaphorical escape from the meaning of Picasso's painting, from Picasso himself, through Alice's portrait, her devotion, into the self-possessed (and shorn) *I*.

This story concludes: *I am not here*. The *Autobiography* tricks those who did not see Gertrude Stein's significance as a writer, who missed her identity when they contemplated the beauty of Picasso's painting, who saw her as Picasso's creature, and it tricks the form itself. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is the story of a fiction about Gertrude Stein. By redoubling her subjectivity, Gertrude Stein parades the egotism that creates autobiography, makes each hagiographical incident in the narrative, each laudation of the self, a calculated affront, and conceals until the last her presiding smile. As it is posed and solved by the Cubists, the question of portraiture, the problem of the external and the internal, is one of the central topics in the text, but what Gertrude Stein had already shown, and could not show here, was her own solution as a literary artist. Impersonating an autobiographer, revealing his alibi, she could, however, begin from the inside an ironic demystification of traditional narrative, restate the problem of the external and the internal in discourse through her final and surprising use of the Crusoe myth, and send rippling back over Alice's simplicities a confusion. Revenge is not, therefore, too strong a word to use in characterizing her formal strategies in the *Autobiography*. She is not the lady in the portrait. The book her publishers solicit can only be written by Alice. Indeed she parodies this arrangement by using a cleverly posed photograph of the author as her frontispiece. Alice is framed on the threshold in the illumined background. She stands directly facing the camera, one hand on the door latch, as though she were about to enter. In the foreground, in profile, partially obscured by the darkness, a writer sits at her desk, pen in hand. The photograph is appropriately entitled: *Alice B. Toklas at the door, photograph by Man Ray*.

It is, after all, Picasso's celebrity that gives the *Autobiography* its assured public in 1933-34, a dependence that perversely establishes Gertrude Stein not as a pre-eminent artist, Picasso's peer, but as a chronicler, the peer of Janet Flanner. From that position she looks

askance at the spectacle of artistic success. Edmund Wilson's apt phrasing of this attitude : "Success, for her seems to imply some imposture and deterioration,"<sup>3</sup> also describes her own ultimate celebrity as the eccentric writer who wrote amiable nonsense about roses. Drawn contractually into a mode of discourse (historical narration) she had already disparaged and abandoned in her previous writing, Gertrude Stein's "success" as an autobiographer is in fact an imposture, but here, as it is not in *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), imposture is seized as an opportunity. It is Alice who shrinks Leo Stein to the vague reference, "her brother," who gradually erases Henri Matisse, who condescends to praise an oafish Hemingway. And yet these settled scores do not adequately reflect the substance of her animus in the *Autobiography*. Because of its complexity, that issue is delicately treated. Gertrude Stein genuinely admired Picasso's genius, understood it with a precocity that is still striking, owed him a great deal, and yet obviously his splendor obscured her own. He had painted her definitive likeness, captured her, rung her bell as she had rung Alice's bell. The risk of becoming Picasso's Gertrude as Alice is Gertrude's Alice is certainly before her in the *Autobiography*. And it involves crucially the question of her role, her place in the "heroic age of cubism," the very issue of her identity. The long struggle to free herself from the patronizing dominance of Leo Stein, to become independent, takes a subtler turn in her alliance with Picasso. He is at once her fraternal animus, a short Spanish Lincoln, and a towering presence in her life, the brilliant male colleague whose ugly work, unlike her own, is seriously regarded and accepted as beautiful. His virile splendor as an artist is the veritable sign in the *Autobiography* of her own neglect and isolation, her awkward standing as a curious woman. That splendor also defines her task: once again, to declare her difference.

Clarification of her difference begins with Alice's description of her arrival in Paris at the start of Chapter 2:

This was the year 1907. Gertrude Stein was just seeing through the press *Three Lives* which she was having privately printed, and she was deep in *The Making of Americans*, her thousand page book. Picasso had just finished his portrait of her which nobody at that time liked except the painter and the painted and which is now so famous, and he had just begun his strange complicated picture of three women, Matisse had just finished his *Bonheur de Vivre*, his

3 Edmund Wilson, *The Shores of Light* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1952), p. 579.

first big composition which gave him the name of fauve, or a zoo. It was the moment Max Jacob has since called the heroic age of cubism (*ABT*, p. 7).

The order and equivalence of these events speaks for itself; Gertrude Stein figures prominently in the citation, but there is also, less visibly, a focusing of the subject that cubism heroically considers in its first phase. All these works essentially deal with the form and nature of women. When Alice first sees the canvas of *Three Women* in Picasso's studio, she is taken aback: "I felt that there was something painful and beautiful there and oppressive but imprisoned" (*ABT*, p. 27). *Three Lives*, we are told, is written beneath a Cezanne portrait of a woman, a Cezanne that diverts Gertrude Stein from a translation of Flaubert's *Trois Contes* into the first notable exercise of her experimental style. What Alice says of Picasso's painting can also be said of *Three Lives*. And this coincidence does not escape us. "She was then in the middle of her negro story Melanctha Herbert, the second story of *Three Lives* and the poignant incidents that she wove into the life of Melanctha were often these she noticed in walking down the hill from the rue Ravignan" (*ABT*, p. 60). That is, from Picasso's studio. As Gertrude Stein poses for Picasso, she composes the Melanctha section in *Three Lives*. Cezanne, Picasso's master, is her master, and here are the two pupils — the one painting, the other writing — equally placed in the situation of learning.

In rethinking the conventions of classical painting, particularly the anatomy of the human figure, the cubists wisely begin with the most familiar, the most given, of such figures — the woman. This portentous image is the first broken. Gertrude Stein not only understood the method at work in this iconoclasm, she also grasped its metaphysical dimension. As Picasso subverts the tyranny of the subject in his painting, collapsing its story, its reference, by removing the orientation of one-point perspective, Gertrude Stein similarly attacks the episteme presupposing traditional narrative. But the point she stresses in this comparison is difference. Indeed critics who strive to cross the analogy and discuss her work as an application of cubist technique invariably emerge with lame readings of the text. L. T. Fitz's examination of *Three Lives*, for example, imposes the flat surface of cubist painting, its "total lack of a focal point," on the Melanctha section and ends up merely straining the analogy. "Every page is literally as important to the work as every other page," Fitz tells us, "just as every part of a cubist painting is as important as every other part."<sup>4</sup> Richard Bridgman's interpretation

4 L. T. Fitz, "Gertrude Stein and Picasso: The Language of Surfaces," *American Literature*, 45 (May, 1973), p. 231.

of *Three Lives*, on the other hand, traces a Jamesian angle in her style, examines the text as an experiment with literary discourse, and is therefore shrewdly alert to the linguistic complexity that underlies the pictorial sameness Fitz beholds in Gertrude Stein's repetition. Bridgman also shows us how the "programmatically conception of style"<sup>5</sup> in 'Melanctha' complicates the feeling and theme of an earlier novel, *Things As They Are* (1903); how, in brief, the lesbian strife in that novel is transformed into heterosexual conflict in *Three Lives*. The logic and significance of this transformation, first considered under the spell of the Cezanne portrait and then worked out in her mind as she sat for Picasso, as he painted her portrait, effectively constitutes Gertrude Stein's initial confrontation with the designating force of grammar in writing, her first systematic questioning of the rules of discourse. If Picasso asks in the painting of this period: what is the thing seen? — her question was just as momentous: what is the thing spoken?

Melanctha Herbert's passion for clarity reveals its futility through her disclaiming repetition of *certainly*. Only her feelings are certain, and these she can not express. What she wants, and what Jeff Campbell wants, is the assurance of definition, the simplicity of male/female, and they do not find it. Melanctha's unspeakable feelings presumably obstruct this resolution. Their conversations are carefully orchestrated: each insistent *I*, each mistaken *you*, asserts the speaker's contrary isolation, and all the while the adverbs throb with the desire to be understood. What *it* is that tortures Melanctha and deters Jeff Campbell is left unsaid. It is, this *it*, a large and resonant Jamesian *it*. Meaning appears through the acoustical side of their discourse, through the dissonance of their tones. We do not see in the Melanctha section of *Three Lives*, we listen, and what we hear is the agitation of refusal. These Jamesian echoes are pronounced: Melanctha and Jeff do in simplified sing-song the intricate duet of May Bartram and John Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle." In this period, 1903-1907, Chapter 3 in the *Autobiography*, Gertrude Stein also encounters Guillaume Apollinaire whose artistic sympathies are noted in James R. Mellow's *Charmed Circle, Gertrude Stein & Company*: "each had a highly developed aural sense of language, and in certain of their poems . . . the structure of the lines was carried by repetitions, percussive phrases, natural pauses, the sense of sound."<sup>6</sup> Yet these are the features of her style, its finish; the style itself, as the whole of her written being, is the result of a protracted

5 Richard Bridgman, *The Colloquial Style in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 175.

6 James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle, Gertrude Stein & Company* (New York: Avon, 1974), p. 124.



meditation on the nature of identity, a meditation that becomes at last an act of faith. Gertrude Stein sociably works in the climate of experimentation then so brilliantly expansive in Paris, Alice faithfully records the heroic *gestes* in the *Autobiography*, but her distinctive approach to writing is not simply plucked from influential currents in the air. It is drawn from the visceral center of her doubted being.

*Three Women, Three Lives, Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, The Making of Americans*. How did one portray women? What is a woman? Picasso's conception in these paintings breaks the familiar externality of the feminine form, strips the conventional pose of its Vesalian musculature, and discloses a dreamlike monstrosity inside the form, "something painful and beautiful there and oppressive but imprisoned" (*ABT*, p. 27). Gertrude Stein painstakingly analyzes the "bottom nature" of men and women in *The Making of Americans* (1906-11), undertakes a quasi-sociological examination that gradually stands Aristotelian classification on its head, or vice versa. For she seeks to specify the kinds of men and women, to determine the politics of their exchanges in family life, and is drawn irresistably to a radical substitution of criteria. The roles that fix men and women as husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, are not sexually determined. It is a question, rather, of how the will chooses to exert itself:

Some women have it in them to love others because they need them, many of such ones subdue the ones they need for loving, they subdue them and they own them; some women have it in them to love only those who need them; some women have it in them only to have power when others need them; some women have it in them only to have power when others love them, others loving them gives to them strength in domination as their needing those who love them keeps them from subduing others before these others love them.<sup>7</sup>

These are in some sense the explanations Melanctha is unable to make in *Three Lives*, the explanations that would turn Jeff Campbell's wifequest into a different kind of courtship. So it goes in this tireless, often tedious, "thousand page book." There are the "dependent independent" and the "independent dependent," categories that are endlessly refined and shaded. Some fight by resisting, others by attacking. So various is the difference and blend of aggression and passivity in men and women that at length the entire issue of masculine/feminine modification

<sup>7</sup> *The Making of Americans* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), p. 163. Subsequent references will be indicated *MA* in the text.



trembles. The concept of *A Man* or *A Woman* standing behind *he* and *she* (as Platonic mannikins) slowly erodes, and then finally *he/she* also disappears. In this cleared space the massive coda of *The Making of Americans* lovingly relishes the indefinite pronoun: any one, some one, each one, every one. "Some are doing the thing they are doing in a family living," she writes. "It is done and done by them. There are enough of them doing some such thing, and certainly not too many, certainly very many, certainly some and each one of them is some one by whom something is done and done" (*MA*, p. 921). Gertrude Stein had thoroughly neutered discourse, and in much of her later experimental portraiture she would use this ambiguous reference (this one, some one, very many) as if indeed it were (for anyone) superbly illustrative.

It is from this theoretical vantage-point that she criticizes Matisse's loss of aggressive independence in the *Autobiography*:

Matisse intimated that Gertrude Stein had lost interest in his work. She answered him, there is nothing within you that fights itself and hitherto you have had the instinct to produce antagonism in others which stimulated you to attack. But now they follow.

That was the end of the conversation but a beginning of an important part of *The Making of Americans*. Upon this idea Gertrude Stein based some of her most permanent distinctions in types of people (*ABT*, pp. 80-81).

And it is from this reference, this rich sense of her own achievement in portraiture, that Gertrude's Alice amusingly recounts the method of Felix Vallotton's portrait-painting. "When he painted a portrait," Alice relates, "he made a crayon sketch and then began painting at the top of the canvas straight across. Gertrude Stein said it was like pulling down a curtain as slowly moving as one of his swiss glaciers. Slowly he pulled the curtain down and by the time he was at the bottom of the canvas, there you were. The whole operation took about two weeks and then he gave the canvas to you" (*ABT*, p. 62). To sit for such a portrait gives Gertrude Stein a "strange sensation." And there, in two weeks, you were. Behind the curtain of Vallotton's paint. Picasso, on the other hand, has a hard time with her portrait. He begins using a "very small palette which was of a uniform brown grey colour, mixed with some more brown grey" (*ABT*, p. 57), and then proceeds to lose his way. This first of some ninety sittings is vividly recalled; so too is the beauty of several preliminary sketches, and yet, just as the manuscript of *Three Lives* is in the process of being typed, just as Gertrude Stein arrives at this symbolic

moment filled with a strong sense of herself: "All of a sudden one day Picasso painted out the whole head. I can't see you any longer when I look, he said irritably. And so the picture was left like that" (*ABT*, pp. 64-65). A mock combat is herein joined between the distance and mystery of the painted and the skill of the painter. At some high and cerebral plane, this contest is also amorous. Gertrude Stein flees, is captured, then escapes again. Although the drama of this combat is completely told in Chapter 3, the section in which the "heroic age of cubism" is established, there is constant reference to it thereafter (the portrait mediates their friendship), and in the final chapter, as we shall see, it is briefly retold.

The question before Gertrude Stein in the *Autobiography* is that of identity. Like conventional portraiture, autobiography typically strives for the likeness, the lifelike, strives to identify. It pictures through an arrangement of incident the meaning of one's life. It specifies the self writing about the self. Yet cubist portraiture, and Gertrude Stein's own portraiture in prose, breaks the historical prop (memory) that holds autobiography in its form. Recollection, or memory, realizes the object in a fictive dimension. It intervenes, stalls the quick motion of perceiving consciousness, and restrictively imposes the perspective of serial duration on the writer. Such is narrative: a beginning, a middle, and an ending. In the terms of her own writing, then, and in what she had seen in Picasso's painting, autobiographical narrative, if straight, is merely a form of journalism, as thoroughly true as the stories in a newspaper. It tells us too much, it tells us too little. "Really most of the time one sees only a feature of a person with whom one is, the other features are covered by a hat, by the light, by clothes for sport and everybody is accustomed to complete the whole entirely from their knowledge," she writes in *Picasso*, "but Picasso when he saw an eye, the other one did not exist for him and only the one he saw did exist for him . . ." (*P*, p. 15). Yet this is the text, this anecdotal narrative, that makes Gertrude Stein publically visible for the first time in her career, makes a Gertrude Stein visible. Who, then, is the Gertrude Stein figured in Picasso's portrait, in Alice's portrait, in her own? It is a pronominal being in each case: a she, a he, and the concealed one who writes. Picasso decapitates the painted Gertrude Stein and for a year she remains headless in the portrait. In the meanwhile she takes her own head to Italy, Picasso goes to Spain. She begins *The Making of Americans*, that long questioning of sexual identity, the kinds of men and women, and then returns to Paris "under the spell of the thing she was doing" only to find (again the coincidence is apt) the portrait finished. "The day he returned from Spain Picasso sat down and out of his head painted the head in without having seen

Gertrude Stein again. And when she saw it he and she were content. It is very strange but neither can remember at all what the head looked like when he painted it out" (*ABT*, p. 70). There she is then, Picasso's she, the celebrated Gertrude Stein.

But the *Autobiography* immediately jumps forward in time, almost to the present of its writing, and here Gertrude's Alice juxtaposes her own Gertrude Stein, the Gertrude Stein who first struck her, in Alice's own words, as a "golden brown presence, burned by the Tuscan sun," as a "Roman Emperor."<sup>8</sup> Again Picasso looks and does not see his Gertrude Stein. She has cut the braided queen's crown of hair that adorns her in the portrait, cropped her hair short, like a man, and now stands apart (in her own imperial splendor) from his identification. He has painted a woman, she has become a man. The *Autobiography* is stretched between these two points of reference: Picasso's she, Alice's he. And it is the writer, that latter-day Defoe, who comprehends both, who is neither.

Only a few years ago when Gertrude Stein had had her hair cut short, she had always up to that time worn it as a crown on top of her head as Picasso has painted it, when she had had her hair cut, a day or so later she happened to come into a room and Picasso was several rooms away. She had a hat on but he caught sight of her through two doorways and approaching her quickly called out, Gertrude, what is it, what is it. What is what, Pablo, she said. Let me see, he said. She let him see. And my portrait, said he sternly. Then his face softening he added, mais, quand meme tout y est, all the same it is all there.

(*ABT*, p. 70)

Picasso scrutinizes the cropped hair, takes in the difference. "And my portrait, said he sternly." The joke is slight, and yet in it Picasso speaks a judgment: *this is who you are*. She is not. Like Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," the story of Gertrude Stein's escape in the *Autobiography* is the story of an escape into the namelessness of androgyny. "Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged," Whitman advises us at the close of his song. If I am not here, if I am not there, "I stop some where waiting for you."<sup>9</sup> Gertrude Stein had similarly tutored herself in *The Making of Americans*; she had reached certainly the knowledge of Whitman's

8 Alice B. Toklas, *What Is Remembered* (New York: Holt, Rinehard & Winston, 1963), p. 23.

9 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass, The First (1855) Edition* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), p. 86. Subsequent references will be indicated *LG* in the text.

"Calamus," understood how difficult it was to express discursively the nature of desire, to sort it out in kind. That apprehension is clearly stated in a contemporaneous work, *A Long Gay Book* (1906-11). Here the writer slowly turns from self-contemplation to regard the fundamental natures of those who have confidently sorted the specific kind of their desire.

Always all the men and women all around have in them some one of the many kinds of men and women that have each one of them many millions made like them, always all the men and women all around have it in them to have one fundamental nature in them and other kinds of nature are mixed up in them with this kind of nature in them so it takes all the knowing one can learn with all the living to ever know it about any one around them the fundamental nature of them and how everything is mixed up in them.<sup>10</sup>

Notice of her own mixed fundamental nature in the *Autobiography* is chastely handed to Louis Bromfield as an unpublished manuscript, *Things As They Are*; — and to the educated reader as the message: *I know you know*. Inadvertently, while looking for the manuscript of *The Making of Americans*, Gertrude Stein comes upon *Things As They Are*. "She was very bashful and hesitant about it, did not really want to read it. Louis Bromfield was at the house that evening and she handed him the manuscript and said to him, you read it" (*ABT*, p. 104). What Bromfield thought is not recorded in the *Autobiography*, but Hemingway, who fares poorly in the text, has recorded his thoughts about things as they were at 27 rue de Fleurus. His criticism of Gertrude Stein in *A Moveable Feast* begins by demeaning "truly ambitious women writers," moves through a brutal account of a quarrel between Gertrude and Alice ("please, pussy, please"), and then comes at last, unerringly, to the juxtaposition that figures so importantly in the *Autobiography*: "She got to look like a Roman emperor and that was fine if you like your women to look like Roman emperors. But Picasso had painted her, and I could remember her when she looked like a woman from Friuli."<sup>11</sup> The shot is cheap, but cheaper still is Hemingway's sparse mention of a single text, *The Making of Americans*. In the thickness of his thought, she is at her worst a woman

10 Matisse Picasso *Gertrude Stein, With Two Shorter Pieces* (Barton, Berlin, Millerton: Something Else Press, 1972), p. 16.

11 Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. 117.

writer, at her best the “woman from Friuli” who sits captured in Picasso’s portrait.

The chapters that follow the recognition scene in Chapter 3 (“Let me see, he said. She let him see.”), the moment of her escape, and this cryptic conclusion to Chapter 4, busily describe Gertrude Stein’s double life: her existence as a historical figure, the connoisseur and critic, and her arduous struggle to be read, the loneliness of her life as a writer. At the same time Alice’s uxorial voice throws upon that double life the tone of still another duplicity. For the Gertrude Stein who expands in her writing, who expounds, who chats companionably with Carl Van Vechten and Sherwood Anderson, assumes invariably a masculine stance. By the end of the narrative these two sets of duplicity are joined, remarkably fused by the Crusoe myth. We begin with the apotheosis, which is rendered in a suitably ‘noble’ setting. Gertrude Stein has struck up a friendship with the Duchess of Clermont-Tonnerre, and the two women decide to cut their unfashionably long hair. “Cut it off she said and I did.” For two days Alice cuts Gertrude Stein’s hair until only a “cap of hair” remains. On seeing it, Sherwood Anderson remarks: “it makes her look like a monk.” Briefly the *she* of the painting is recalled. “As I have said, Picasso seeing it, was for a moment angry and said, and my portrait, but very soon added, after all it is all there” (*ABT*, p. 304). The remark now hangs with the proper ironic ambivalence. The *Autobiography* then sweeps to its close. She can not write her autobiography, Alice protests, because “I am a pretty good housekeeper and a pretty good gardener and a pretty good needle-woman and a pretty good secretary and a pretty good editor and a pretty good vet for dogs and I have to do them all at once and I found it difficult to add being a pretty good author” (*ABT*, pp. 309-310). Capably, referring to Defoe, Gertrude Stein then makes her appearance as the writer, as the *I* who has done this voided portrait, and the *Autobiography* concludes. On the opposing page is a facsimile of the first page of the manuscript. The handwriting returns us abruptly to the dark figure of the unknown writer who sits, pen poised, at the desk in the frontispiece.

Friday’s story in necessarily Crusoe’s. It is Crusoe who gives him life and language, and such is the legend that informs this narrative. *We two alone on an island*. Here is a chronicle crowded with social occasions, spilling over with litanies of illustrious names, and it is about life on a deserted island. The affairs of the famous are duly noted, but the tale told is Crusoe’s, a tale of primordial loneliness, of the agony of not being known. It is a mistake, Alice continually stresses, this refusal to know the discursive Gertrude Stein, to read her writing, to take her seriously. “Gertrude Stein was in those days a little bitter,” she writes of the period

1919-1932, "all her unpublished manuscripts, and no hope of publication or serious recognition" (*ABT*, p. 241). And yet Alice's designation as Friday also distances us from the immediate travail of the writer. "The geniuses came and talked to Gertrude Stein," she observes, "and the wives sat with me" (*ABT*, p. 105). The important and prolific period of Gertrude Stein's early portraiture, the phase in which she forges her style, is telescoped into a few pages, set forth as a catalogue. We see in reference, dimly, Gertrude Stein alone, stranded and bereft, the solitary writer who writes before God for no one an unreadable "thousand page book," who writes so that she will not go mad, who writes to preserve and describe herself. Although Alice is a loving and helpful amanuensis, an audience, she never joins Crusoe in the vigil he keeps in discourse, in writing. She knows Crusoe, but not what Crusoe knows. A lover's joke, a writer's joke. Neither Picasso's portrait nor Alice's in the *Autobiography* constitutes Gertrude Stein. She is not that she, not this he, but the *I* who writes. Alice's Fridayness is in fact Gertrude Stein's ironic commentary on the competence of her narration. Like the painter Felix Vallotton, the autobiographer begins at the top, at the beginning, and then sequentially strokes in the events, the dates, places, people, and then there you are. But the self revealed is always an other. If you are Alice, you write about Gertrude. If you are Gertrude, you write about Alice's Gertrude. Even if the autobiography is sophisticated, if it concedes its bias, understands the repressive acts of memory, it still contracts to identify, to represent and name a self. The best a sophisticated and earnest autobiography can do is to be as true as Rousseau's *Confessions*. If it is sophisticated, and not sincere, then it is *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Autobiography is thus doomed to bad faith. It always describes a surface, illustrates the external, throws light on the familiar. It is what Friday sees.

But if the human being is not "paintable," if autobiography begins and ends with the statement, *I am not here*, what does this tell us about Gertrude Stein's writing? The vindictive treacheries stroked into this text at once declare her freedom from definition, seduce the reader, and subvert the form. Autobiography, the story of one's self, is narrative in the raw, narrative in its most perilous genre. We need to tell our story. We want to know about the lives of others. We want to know about this life, but not as it is, as it was. We desire effectively the alienation, the fiction, of an imposed order, a framed significance, and so we look for perspective in the security of the past tense and receive a fictive assurance of the real. The *Autobiography* provides this bogus materiality. It gives us an anecdotal narrative told by a scrupulous

woman who is “very fond of needlework” (*ABT*, p. 159), and then takes it all back, recants. “And therefore,” Gertrude Stein writes in *The Geographical History of America* (1936), “there are no witnesses to the autobiography of any one that has a human mind.”<sup>12</sup> In this insouciant philosophical treatise, written between *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Everybody's Autobiography*, she methodically disjoins mind and nature, turns her poodle, “a little dog,” into an empirical knower, and with great charm thoroughly addles Bishop Berkeley and William James. “No one knowing me knows me,” she asserts, “And I am I I” (*GHA*, p. 113). Looking at us. Like Crusoe on his island, the Crusoe who has no audience, no witnesses, the “human mind is.” What emerges from this radical distinction, however, is not the anguish of solipsism, but a cubist *jou*, I I, the play of a liberated subjectivity at large in itself, at large in the field of language. The *Geographical History* breaks its thoughts into a disordering sequence of chapters, parts, acts, scenes, numbers, plays, examples, pages and volumes, and then numbers them capriciously at random. “So once more to renounce because and become” (*GHA*, p. 192), Gertrude Stein declares in a section entitled “autobiography number one.” And in this self-admonition we see the rigor of her experimental style. For she cuts from narrative the idea of origin and end, deprives such discourse of its teleological assumption, and attacks the alibis that give the writer protective distance. Without *because*, without *become*, he is left only the “continuous present” of his writing. There he is absolutely present, always the responsible *I*. His writing is the activity of consciousness purely expressed.

The enterprise of Gertrude Stein's discourse is a reaction to this moment, the instant of generation. Here the writer confronts language, his competence, its competence, and here grammar imposes its edifying force on him. The drama of utterance is always the thing seen in her writing. In *The Making of Americans*, for example, she stubbornly rethinks the conceptual structure of a chosen sentence and then rearranges its phase structure. Sentences are not repeated, they are regenerated, and at each juncture, each branch, she figures the difference. So her thoughts march gradually through all their permutations into other thoughts and she accumulates, without swerving, a vast redundant prose. Her project, it would seem, is more a grammarian's than a historian's: “To go on now giving all of the description of how repeating comes to have meaning, how it forms itself, how one must distinguish the different meanings in repeating” (*MA*, p.

12 *The Geographical History of America* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 90. Subsequent references will be indicated *GHA* in the text.



294). Indeed the individual Herslands and Dehnings, whose characterizing repetition is Gertrude Stein's ostensible subject, disappear from the text for long stretches of time, and what is before us is the writer's repetition, a new subject: the work of making sentences that will do the work of referring, of representing, of being about something or someone. What is the meaning found in repeating? It discloses consciousness in its aboriginal motion, reaching to speak. Thus Gertrude Stein writes about writing by parsing thought as it passes into written language. She begins, that is, not from the point of view of Samuel Beckett or John Barth, but with utterance itself, in that tight space where the internal becomes external, is voiced, long before the question of form or mode or intention can be asked. Here she interrogates the act of speech. How does it occur? Why this version of a sentence, or this one and this one? Thought measures itself syntactically in *The Making of Americans*. With a boldness that is often truly stupefying, she risks all the priorities of a text. For who has the stamina to confront the massive articulation of consciousness as it seeks to determine a "bottom nature," to capture the being of a person, as it decides that nature in language? What we want in a text is the consequence of writing, the formed result. We want the finished portrait of thought.

In brief Gertrude Stein discovers in this exploded novel the metalinguistic stance that enables her to compose *Tender Buttons* (1914), the slender book that decisively places her as a writer beside the artists then fashioning the analytic phase of cubism. The great difference in these two texts signifies the drastic shift in her attention from the sentence to lexical choice, for here the setting is small, circumscribed, domestic. It is not the past, that widespread space, but the immediate field of one's experience. Within it, still painstaking, she strives to peel from the humble objects in her perception (carafes, cushions, cooking) their determining labels and see them apart from their obvious designation. To do so, she disrupts the predication of the sentence. Writing emerges now as poetic conflict, as a struggle *with* language *against* language. In effect she moves signification back to the *Ursprache*, the mythical instant when each Adam in his Garden, empowered with naming, regards this strange nameless creature, this strange unspecified thing, and the whole world so alive with diverse being is a "blind glass." A reflection. Which is where *Tender Buttons* begins, posing a carafe.

In the thirties Gertrude Stein undertakes a protracted seminar on this particular approach to writing: *How To Write* (1931), *Lectures in*

*America* (1934), *Narration* (1935), but these texts, while often trenchant and witty, are not finally the commentaries that elucidate her style. They are instead works of art in their own right, lyrical extensions of the style. It is rather in the compromised autobiographical writing that we find, paradoxically, the clearest introduction to her experimental discourse. For the Crusoe myth encoded in the *Autobiography* constantly renews the question of identity and recalls the motivation of that discourse, Gertrude Stein's awakening, her early preoccupation "with finding out what was inside myself to make me what I was."<sup>13</sup> What was she? The *Autobiography* teases us with that question. "Let me see, he said. She let him see" (*ABT*, p. 70). It is a revenge that falls not only upon Picasso's proprietary sense of her womanhood, his sense of her subjection in the painting, but equally upon language itself. What he sees, what we see, is the I I of the *Geographical History*. "As I say a noun is a name of a thing," she writes in "Poetry and Grammar," "and therefore slowly if you feel what is inside that thing you do not call it by the name by which it is known."<sup>14</sup> For Whitman, whose "language experiment" so actively prefigures Gertrude Stein's, the right names, the right nouns, are always there to be used. We do not lack words, only the courage to use them. Gertrude Stein's criticism moves along the same angle of assumption, but is far more comprehensive. Language itself is politicized, an instruction. Long before the question of diction arises, there are the parts of speech, the rules of grammar, syntactical laws. The way we say precedes what we say. The sentence has already organized the world we wish to speak as we see it. What does it say of discourse, she asks variously, when discourse can not determine "what I was," when it can only interpose between *he* and *she* the reification of *it*? Autobiography extends the imprisoning form of the sentence, connects subject to object, organizes the life of an individual, and distorts it. In *Everybody's Autobiography* Gertrude Stein writes as Gertrude Stein, but her distrust of the form, of its connections, of the value of identity, remains constant. "That is really the trouble with an autobiography," she writes, "you do not of course you do not really believe yourself why should you, you know so well so very well that it is not yourself, it could not be yourself because you cannot remember right and if you do remember right it does not sound right and of course it does not sound right because it is not right." Yet here she is once more in the form, and this time without a

13 *Writings and Lectures, 1909-1945*, ed. Patricia Meyerowitz (New York: Penguin, 1967), p. 85. Subsequent references will be indicated *WL* in the text.

14 *Everybody's Autobiography* (New York: Coopers Square Publishers, 1971), p. 68. Subsequent references will be indicated *EA* in the text.

deflective persona. Although Bridgman considers the book “one of her major successes,” a text in which she “took up the most desperate problems she was then suffering from and managed to convey them without diminishing their complexity,”<sup>15</sup> *Everybody's Autobiography* is so perversely dependent on the context of the Toklas narrative that it is, properly speaking, an epilogue (or response) to the first book.

An introduction hinges the two narratives: “Alice B. Toklas did hers and now everybody will do theirs” (*EA*, p. 3). Gertrude Stein then reports a series of conversations with David Edstrom, Dashiell Hammett and Mary Pickford. In her talk with Hammett she complains that women writers in the nineteenth century “never could invent women they always made the women be themselves seen splendidly or sadly or heroically or beautifully or despairingly or gently, and they never could make any other kind of woman” (*EA*, p. 5). She is in Hollywood. Mary Pickford, who played these glamorous roles on the screen, regards Gertrude Stein suspiciously as a rival star and decides to keep her distance. Hammett patiently explains the narcissism of male writers. “It is nice being a celebrity,” Gertrude Stein observes, “a real celebrity who can decide who they want to meet and say so and they come or do not come as you want them” (*EA*, pp. 3-4). People approach her on the street. Her books are in the shop windows. Her photograph appears regularly in the newspapers and magazines. Mary Pickford might well look upon her with jaundice. But what other kind of woman is Gertrude Stein? Having escaped the significance of Picasso's portrait in the *Autobiography*, she had set another image in its place, the esoteric celebrity, and the problem in this autobiography is once again to assert her difference, her human mind against her human nature, and disappear like Whitman, like Huckleberry Finn. But the success of the first autobiography mesmerizes her. Suddenly she is rich, everybody knows her, she has a public. It leaves her speechless, so she writes in *Everybody's Autobiography*, unable to write. This crisis, her sudden confusion of the external and the internal, plays throughout the text. “It is all a question of the outside being outside,” she asserts, “and the inside being inside. As long as the outside does not put a value on you it remains outside but when it does put a value on you then it gets inside or rather if the outside puts a value on you then all your inside gets to be outside” (*EA*, p. 47). The destruction of her Crusoe life, her changed position as a writer, had radically altered her stance as an autobiographer.

To return to the form, then, Gertrude Stein had first to justify doing it.

15 Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 284.

She could say legitimately, and did, that it was now her turn, Alice having told her story, but what then was she to write about, and from which point of view? She could write about her American tour, life in Bilignin, her work, her past, visiting notables, but in so doing she inescapably wrote the referential discourse her first autobiography had so wickedly emptied of relevance. That revenge falls at last upon the writer of *Everybody's Autobiography*. "Anything is an autobiography," she declares in the introduction, prefacing her talk with Hammett, "but this was a conversation" (*EA*, p. 5). Given her own sportive approach to literary form, this sanction is sufficient, but in fact the magisterial *I* that finally seizes Alice's story, that plays whimsically with philosophical discourse in the *Geographical History*, is troubled and uncertain in this wavering narrative. What are the resources of her inside now that so much of it is outside? The astonishment of her American tour and the impending strife in Europe (war in Spain, unrest in France) are compressive forces that obviously confuse her perspective, but as well it is the telling of her own past, her writing *about* herself, that also vexes the sureness of her solitude. How did she come to be called Gertrude Stein? The question emerges when someone asks "what skin the peau de chagrin was made of?" The word is looked up. Peau de chagrin "was made of anything mule calf or horse and I said how did it happen to be called peau de chagrin and Madame Giraud said and how did you happen to be called Gertrude Stein." The arbitrariness of the sign is once again affirmed, names are nouns that tell us nothing, but then she fixes on this haphazard name, Stein, her name, and at once stoically accepts and defiantly refuses it. It is impossible to judge her tone in this instance.

Steins were called Steins in the time of Napoleon before that any name was a name but in the time of Napoleon in any country he went through the name of any one had to be written and so they took the name they gave them and Stein was an easy one. Then when any of us were named we were named after some one who is already dead, after all if they are living the name belongs to them so any one can be named after a dead one, so there was a grandmother she was dead and her name not an easy one began with G so my mother preferred it should be an easy one so they named me Gertrude Stein. All right that is my name.

The passage occurs in the midst of a meditation on death. She takes up ambivalently the burden of her name. Gertrude Stein, this peau de chagrin. "Identity always worries me," she concludes, "and memory and eternity" (*EA*, p. 115). It is as though she suddenly perceives the *a priori*

of classical autobiography: that it is a summation, the presentation of a self about to die, a prelude to biography. The noun names. It identifies. It is the skin of a dead thing that has nothing to do with what the dead thing was. Names are taken from those already dead. We wear our names as we wear the skins of dead animals. In *Everybody's Autobiography* Gertrude Stein's long attack on the coherence and stability of the noun takes a desperate turn. Here she is, then, wearing her dead grandmother's G: Gertrude Stein.

An escaped slave writes *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, doubling and redoubling his inversion of the mode. The first act of the fugitive is to change his name. *I am not here*. Gertrude Stein's appropriation of the Crusoe myth at once politicizes the text and invests it with erotic energy. Friday's point of view is also Crusoe's: this master has been a slave, and he knows what she knows. That cubism begins with a male deconstruction of the female form as it pre-exists in the eye of Picasso and Matisse. She, too, begins a deconstruction of how women are known, but that work is overlooked. Here we have only her portrait of their portrait-making, portraits of Picasso and Matisse conceiving and contemplating women, living with women: Matisse as the self-centered husband, Picasso as the charming rogue. With Friday's knowing look, Gertrude Stein regards these two typical sides of the master's face. It is Picasso who dominates the world set forth in the *Autobiography*, who loves Fernande and leaves her, who leads Georges Braque, André Derain and Apollinaire about like a "bullfighter" his retinue, who is "every inch a chief." It is Picasso who places her in the portrait and tells those who question the resemblance not to worry, she will become what she is in the portrait. "Let me see, he said. She let him see." Picasso's masculine authority is a congenial Spanish translation of Leo Stein's inflexible paternalism, the mastery of the brother to whom the world belongs, and it is in this book a pervasive force, the negative charge that gives Gertrude Stein the positive work of escape.

In *Everybody's Autobiography* Picasso appears briefly as a fool. He has left painting to write poetry, an exchange Gertrude Stein regards with anxious disdain. "Well as I say when I first heard he was writing I had a funny feeling," she admits, "one does you know. Things belong to you and writing belonged to me, there is no doubt about it writing belonged to me" (*EA*, p. 15). When Picasso at length reads his poetry, she is relieved: "I drew a long breath and I said it is very interesting" (*EA*, p. 17). In the room at the time is Thornton Wilder. As Picasso lapses from Gertrude Stein's life, his replacements (as the vigorous and productive male friend, the negative charge) grow less substantial: Hemingway, Juan Gris, Francis Picabia, Francis Rose, Thornton

Wilder. She would go on in *Picasso* to round out her view of his artistry, but here his effective participation in her imaginative life is over. They meet again, once more in a gallery, as if in a novel by Henry James, and their roles are reversed. Here it is Picasso who is apprehensive, uncertain, and Gertrude Stein who authoritatively defines him, whose maternal admonition becomes an aggressive embrace. For his part, Picasso submissively yields like Molly Bloom.

ah I said catching him by the lapels of his coat and shaking him, you are extraordinary within your limits but your limits are extraordinarily there and I said shaking him hard, you know it, you know it as well as I do, it is all right you are doing this to get rid of everything that has been too much for you all right all right go on doing it but don't go on trying to make me tell you it is poetry and I shook him again, well he said supposing I do know it, what will I do, what will you do said I and I kissed him, you will go on until you are more cheerful or less dismal and then you will, yes he said, and then you will paint a very beautiful picture and then more of them, and I kissed him again, yes said he. (*EA*, p. 37)

The absence of Picasso as a symbolic factor, the Nietzschean rival, is conspicuous in *Everybody's Autobiography*. When Gertrude Stein now contemplates the hierarchical domain of the patriarchy, and all its intimidation, her view is not that of an escaped slave, malicious, alert, deceptive, but rather the long resigned view of the historian and autobiographer who wears in her name the dead grandmother's G: "Everybody nowadays is a father, there is father Mussolini and father Hitler and father Roosevelt and father Stalin and father Lewis and father Blum and father Franco is just commencing now and there are ever so many more ready to be one" (*EA*, p. 133). Those periods of history where fathers loom and fill up everything, she observes, are always the "most dismal ones." The oppressive presence of her own father is recalled, and the importance of her brothers, especially Michael and Leo, and these familial politics are then framed by the larger issue of the patriarchy itself, the world ruled by fathers. "Sometimes barons and dukes are fathers," she writes, "and then kings come to be fathers and churchmen come to be fathers and then comes a period like the eighteenth century a nice period when everybody has had enough of anybody being a father to them . . . just now everybody has a father, perhaps the twenty-first century like the eighteenth century will be a nice time when everybody forgets to be a father or to have been one" (*EA*, p. 142). The struggle of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* becomes a



dream in *Everybody's Autobiography*, the dream of parricide, king-killing, the "nice period" of revolt when the very principle of identification (the father's business) is shattered.

Keys to Gertrude Stein's experimental mode are strewn throughout her venture into autobiographical narration. But it is in the disguised *mythos* of the first book, her shattering of the portrait as the sign, that we discern the struggle and presumption of her discourse. And more: not just her place in the "heroic age of cubism" or her role in the construction of modernism, but where Gertrude Stein stands in American literature. In the first writing of the *Autobiography*, Alice signs off in the fashion of Huckleberry Finn. A consideration that complicates and explains Gertrude Stein's subsequent use of the Crusoe myth. Life on the raft at 27 rue de Fleurus becomes life on a deserted island and the ontological dimension of the text is altered. Yet Friday speaks in Huck's plain style. And as Huck, the Huck who flees a brutal father who will not tolerate his reading of the world, Alice writes the story of Gertrude Stein's life. But if the spirit of Mark Twain is alive in this text, it is the "language experiment" of *Leaves of Grass* that clarifies Gertrude Stein's discourse. Copyrighted by a Walter Whitman, the anonymous 1855 *Leaves of Grass* begins in its preface with the symbolic removal of a paternal carcass, the dead weight of the past. Whitman takes up the Jeffersonian precept that the earth belongs to the living and dramatically extends it to the "well-shaped heir" who has come to sing the "new life of the new forms" (*LG*, p. 5). Which is precisely where *The Making of Americans* begins: "Once an angry man dragged his father along the ground through his own orchard" (*MA*, p. 3). And it is where Donald Barthelme begins in his recent novel, *The Dead Father* (1975), ironically exploiting this recurrent theme by dragging for the length of his novel an immense Learlike Gulliver who speaks in the imperious person of the Superego, *We*. But Gertrude Stein does not get her dragged father from Whitman; she lifts him from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The anecdote occurs in Chapter Six of Book Seven, just after an Aristotelian discussion of sexual perversion, and it illustrates the "commoner frailty" of anger. It is as though, at the start of her revolutionary book, she perceives the Definitive Father who thinks proairetically the harmonium of behavior she must undo.

It is not against the male writers of her period that Gertrude Stein measures herself, but the artists. T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Ezra Pound do not figure importantly in the *Autobiography*. Nor, for that matter, does she figure largely in their writing. Her isolation in the history of modernism curiously aligns her with Whitman, the Whitman



with whom Pound has such reluctant and distasteful commerce. Indeed the masculine Gertrude Stein, like the feminine Whitman, has had a hard time with her critics and readers. Both elude in their amiable formlessness, their repetition, and tenacious materiality, the tenor and mood of modernism. They create in their work a different movement, a homegrown modernity that regards tradition with lyrical impudence, refuses like Huck to put any stock in dead people, and restores the Edenic vision to writing. They begin at the beginning, always present in the *I*. "What a history is folded," Whitman marvels in *An American Primer*, "folded inward and inward again, in the single word I."<sup>16</sup> Emile Benveniste's essay on the nature of pronouns illuminates this first movement in their experiment with discourse. "What then is the reality to which *I* or *you* refers?" he asks. "It is solely a 'reality of discourse,' and this is a very strange thing. *I* cannot be defined except in terms of 'locution,' not in terms of objects as a nominal sign is. *I* signifies 'the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing *I*.' This instance is unique by definition and has validity only in its uniqueness."<sup>17</sup> In the *Geographical History* Gertrude Stein reiterates the song of the ahistorical self in writing: "I am I I," and argues prescriptively that this is how the human mind must write — always in the captivating mystery of being at once hidden and apparent at the same time. How does Whitman come upon this remarkable discovery, this unique present by present moment of discourse, the *I* instance that enables him to break free of poetic form? By descending, as Gertrude Stein would, into the sublogic of the sentence and meeting in the parts of speech an awful namelessness, a silence. "Double yourself and receive me darkness" (*LG*, p. 108), he writes in "The Sleepers," that striking poem where desire eludes the reach of definition, where *he* and *she* merge in the baffled *I* who dreams and then writes. Whitman is frightened by what happens to language in this poem as he recalls the dream, and he imposes an operatic coda on the poem that brings him back into the stable world of the daytime. For in "The Sleepers" Whitman slips easily into what now looks like the incoherent privacy of Steinian discourse: "The cloth laps a first sweet eating and drinking, / Laps life-swelling yolks . . . laps ear of rose-corn, milky and just ripened: / The white teeth stay, and the boss-tooth advances in darkness, / And liquor is spilled on lips and bosoms by touching glasses, and the best liquor afterward" (*LG*, p. 108). And at the nadir of the dream, just before the redemption of

16 Whitman, *An American Primer* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1970), p. 4.

17 Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 218.

morning, he encounters himself as the “vast dusk bulk” of the submerged whale, his version of Melvillean whiteness.

Who then speaks in the dream, who writes the dream? Whitman finds the primordial function of language, naming, “folded inward and inward again, in the single word I.” In *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons* this confrontation with language, this silence, is always before us; we do not face the “vast dusk bulk” and then turn from the linguistic knowledge of the dreamer. What is a carafe, that blind glass? “A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing” (*WL*, p. 161). Along the way in *The Making of Americans* Gertrude Stein does meet Aristotle, the History of Western Thought, Discourse that divides its world into the True and the False, and in *Tender Buttons* she gracefully soars beyond him/it.

*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Everybody's Autobiography*, to a lesser extent, point us to that system where “nothing is aiming,” and discourse, the blind glass, enchants us by being so wrong. At the University of Chicago in 1935, Gertrude Stein joins Robert Hutchins in his seminar and promptly stirs all his students into passionate discussion. Hutchins is astonished. Even his silent students dispute and remark. She explains: “and then I said you see why they talk to me is that I am like them I do not know the answer, you say you do not know but you do if you did not know the answer you could not spend your life in teaching but I I really do not know, I really do not, I do not even know whether there is a question let alone having an answer for the question” (*EA*, p. 213). Such is the liberating hilarity of “a rose is a rose is a rose,” the wise ignorance Gertrude Stein brings back from her encounter with Aristotle in *The Making of Americans* to this seminar on the Great Books, his shrine in Chicago. Teachers have questions. Fathers have answers. Hutchins is firmly placed on this professorial hook. What is the question? These are in fact Gertrude Stein's last words.